

3-11-04

BROADCAST DECENCY ENFORCEMENT ACT

Congressman Dave Obey - Floor Statement

Mr. Chairman, this bill certainly is fine, as far as it goes, but the fact is that higher fines are going to do nothing to mitigate the real problem, which is the concentration of power in the hands of a limited number of large corporations that believe they are outside the reach of the communities they serve.

Communities determine standards of decency, and the most effective enforcement of those standards is through local ownership of television and radio stations. FCC fines, even in the millions, will not stop national broadcasters from lowering standards.

Infinity stations, for instance, were fined \$1.7 million to settle a series of indecency cases, but that did not stop them. On the contrary, just last year, they were fined for a radio contest for couples willing to perform sexually in public places in New York, Washington, D.C., and other cities with a different radio announcer following each couple and providing the play-by-play accounting of the activities.

The House tried to do something about the core problem when it adopted, in a bipartisan manner, the Commerce, State, Justice appropriations bill, which had a provision to prevent the FCC from relaxing the established limits on network-owned television stations, and the Senate did the same thing. But at the last moment, in the dead of night, the White House convinced Republican congressional leaders to cave in to the special interest media conglomerates and they agreed to weaken the provision.

So by all means, pass this bill, if you want. It will perhaps have a minor effect. But if you really want to do something to give communities the ability to stop this nonsense, you will take away

from the FCC the ability to concentrate broadcasting power in the hands of a few corporations. That is what makes the system so fundamentally arrogant. That is what puts the system so far out of the reach of average citizens, who resent seeing this garbage.

Until the Congress acts on that, it will be simply dealing with window dressing.